

CHAPTER CLII.

About the battles and encounters that we went through and about the defeat that Cortés suffered at his camp, and about many other things that happened in our camp at Tacuba, and how they carried off sixty six soldiers whom they sacrificed.

AS Cortés saw that it was impossible to fill in all the openings, bridges, and canals of water that we captured day by day, which the Mexicans reopened during the night and made stronger than they had been before with barricades, and that it was very hard work fighting and filling in bridges and keeping watch all of us together (all the more as we were most of us wounded and twenty had died), he decided to consult his captains and soldiers who were in his camp, that is Cristóbal de Olid, Francisco Verdugo, Andrés de Tápia, the ensign Corral and Francisco de Lugo, and he also wrote to us in the camp of Pedro de Alvarado and to the camp of Sandoval to take the opinion of all us captains and soldiers. The question he asked was, whether it seemed good to us to make an advance into the City with a rush, so as to reach Tlatelolco, which is the great market of Mexico and is much broader and larger than that of Salamanca, and that if we could reach it, whether it would be well to station all our three camps there, as from thence we should be able to fight through the streets of Mexico without having such difficulty in retreating and should not have so much to fill in, or have to guard the bridges. As was likely to happen in such discussions and consultations, some of us said that it was not good advice or a good idea to intrude ourselves so entirely into the heart of the City, but that we should remain as we were, fighting and pulling down and levelling the houses. We who held the latter opinion gave as the most obvious reason for it that if we stationed ourselves in

Tlatelolco and left the causeways and bridges unguarded and deserted the Mexicans—having so many warriors and canoes—would reopen the bridges and causeways and we would no longer be masters of these. They would attack us with their powerful forces by night and day, and as they always had many impediments made with stakes ready prepared our launches would not be able to help us, thus by the plan that Cortés was proposing we would be the besieged and they [the enemy] would have possession of the land, the country and the lake, and we wrote to him about his proposal so that “it should not happen to us as it had happened before” (as the saying of the Mazegatos runs), when we went fleeing out of Mexico.

After Cortés had heard our opinions and the good reasons we gave for them the only result of all the discussion was that on the following day we were to advance with all the energy we could from all three camps, horse-men as well as crossbowmen, musketeers and soldiers and to push forward until [we reached] the great market place at Tlatelolco many times mentioned by me. When all was ready in all the three camps and our friends the Tlaxcalans [had been warned] as well as the people of Texcoco and those from the towns of the lake who had again given their fealty to His Majesty, who were to come with their canoes to help the launches, one Sunday¹ morning, after having heard mass, we set out from our camp with Pedro de Alvarado, and Cortés set out for his camp, and Sandoval with his companies, and in full force each company advanced capturing bridges and barricades, and the enemy fought like brave warriors and Cortés on his side gained many victories, so too did Gonzalo de Sandoval on his side. Then we on our side had already captured another barricade and a bridge, which was done

¹ Sunday, 30th June.

with much difficulty because Guatemoc had great forces guarding them, and we came out of the fight with many of our soldiers wounded, and one soon died of his wounds. and more than a thousand of our Tlaxcalan friends alone came out of it injured, but still we followed up our victory very cheerfully. Let us return to Cortés and all his army and mention that they captured a rather deep water-opening with a small and very narrow causeway across it which the Mexicans had constructed cleverly and cunningly, for they had foreseen the very thing that now happened to Cortés, and that was, that as he and his captains and soldiers were victorious, and the causeway was crowded with allies, they would go on in pursuit of the enemy who, although they pretended to be fleeing, never ceased shooting javelins, arrows and stones and made some slight stands as though they would resist Cortés until they lured him on to follow them. When they saw that he was indeed following up his victory, they pretended to flee before him. Then, as bad fortune turns the wheel and many sorrows follow on the greatest prosperity, while Cortés was going victoriously in the pursuit of the enemy, either through great carelessness on his part (or because Our Lord Jesus Christ allowed it) he and his captains and soldiers omitted to fill in the water-opening¹ which they had captured. This little causeway by which they had passed had, with cunning, been made [by the Mexicans] very narrow, and the water even penetrated through it in places, and there was much mud and mire. When the Mexicans saw him cross that passage without filling it in they wished for nothing better, and for that very event they had got ready great squadrons of warriors with very valiant captains and many canoes on

¹ In a street between the Calle de Tacuba and the Market of Tlatelolco.

the lake in places where our launches could do them no damage whatever on account of the great stakes which they had fixed there on which they would get impaled. Then there turned upon Cortés and all his soldiers such a furious rush of Mexican squadrons with such cries yells and whistles that our people were not able to withstand the great impetus and force with which they came to fight against Cortés, and all the soldiers and captains and ensigns decided to retreat in very good order, but the enemy came against them with fury until they had driven them to that bad passage, and the allies whom they [the Spaniards] had brought with them, who were very numerous, were so confused that they turned their backs and took to flight without making any resistance. When Cortés saw them thus turning away defeated he encouraged them and cried "Stop, stop Gentlemen, stand firm, what is this that you are doing turning your backs", but he could not check them. Then in that passage which they had neglected to fill up, and on the little causeway which was narrow and unsound, aided by the canoes they [the enemy] defeated Cortés and wounded him in the leg, and they carried off alive sixty six soldiers and killed eight horses. Six or seven Mexican Captains had already seized hold of Cortés, but it pleased Our Lord God to help him and to give him strength to defend himself although he was wounded in one leg, for in the nick of time there promptly came [to his rescue] a very valiant soldier named Cristóbal de Olea, a native of Old Castile, and as soon as he saw Cortés assailed by so many Indians, this soldier Olea fought so bravely that he quickly killed with sword thrusts four of the captains who had hold of him, and another brave soldier named Lerma also helped. They did so much by their personal bravery that they [the Indian Captains] let go of Cortés, but in defending him Olea lost his life there, and even Lerma was at the point

of death. Many soldiers soon ran to assist and although they were badly wounded they laid hands on Cortés and helped him out of that danger and the mire in which he was then standing, and the quarter master Cristóbal de Olid also came in great haste and they took him [Cortés] by the arms and helped him to get out of the water and the mud and brought him a horse on which he escaped from death. At that moment his mayor-domo named Cristóbal de Guzman also arrived and brought him another horse. Meanwhile the Mexican warriors kept on fighting very fearlessly and successfully from the azoteas greatly to our damage, and they captured Cristóbal de Guzman and carried him alive to Guatemoc. The Mexicans kept following in pursuit of Cortés and all his soldiers until they reached their camp. Even after that disaster had happened and they had reached camp, the Mexican squadrons did not cease following them and hunting them down yelling and calling out much abuse and calling them cowards.

Let us cease speaking about Cortés and his defeat and return to our army, which is that of Pedro de Alvarado, in the City of Tacuba, and [say] how we advanced victoriously, and, when we least expected it, we saw advancing against us with loud yells very many squadrons of Mexicans with very handsome ensigns and plumes, and they cast in front of us five heads streaming with blood which they had just cut off the men whom they had captured from Cortés, and they cried:—"Thus will we kill you as we have killed Malinche and Sandoval, and all whom they had brought with them, and these are their heads and by them you may know them well", and saying these words they closed in on us until they laid hands on us and neither cut nor thrust nor crossbows nor muskets availed to stop them, all they did was to rush at us as at a mark. Even so we lost nothing of our order in retreating, for we at once

commanded our friends the Tlaxcalans to clear off quickly from the causeways and bad passages, and this time they did it with a will, for when they saw the five heads of our companions dripping with blood and heard the Mexicans say that they had killed Malinche and Sandoval and all the Teules whom they had brought with them, and that so they would do to us also and to the Tlaxcalans, they were thoroughly frightened, thinking it was true, and for this reason, I say, they cleared off the causeway very completely.

Let us go back to say that as we were retreating we heard the sound of trumpets from the great Cuc, (where stand the idols Huichilobos and Tezcatepuca) which from its height dominates the whole City, and also a drum, a most dismal sound indeed it was, like an instrument of demons, as it resounded so that one could hear it two leagues off, and with it many small tambourines and shell trumpets, horns and whistles. At that moment, as we afterwards learnt, they were offering the hearts of ten of our comrades and much blood to the idols that I have mentioned.

Let us leave the sacrifice and return to our retreat and the great attack they made on us both from the causeway and from the azoteas and the canoes on the lake. Simultaneously there came against us many squadrons which Guatemoc had newly sent out, and he ordered his horn to be sounded. When this horn was sounded it was a signal that his captains and warriors must fight so as to capture their enemies or die in the attempt, and the sound that it made echoed in their ears, and when his captains and squadrons heard it, the fury and courage with which they threw themselves on us, in order to lay hold of us, was terrifying, and I do not know how to describe it here; even now when I stop to remember, it is as though I could see it [all] at this minute, and were

present [again], in that fight and battle. But I reassert that our Lord Jesus Christ saved us, for if he had not given us strength, seeing that we were all wounded, we should never otherwise have been able to reach our ranchos, and I give thanks and praise to God for it, that I escaped that time and many others from the power of the Mexicans.

To go back to our story, the horsemen made charges, and with two heavy cannon that we placed near our ranchos with some loading while others fired we held our own, for the causeway was crowded to the utmost with the enemy and they came after us up to the houses, as though we were already conquered and shot javelins and stones at us, and as I have said, with those cannon we killed many of them. The man who was most helpful that day was a gentleman named Pedro Moreno Medrano, who lives now in Puebla, for he acted as gunner because the artillerymen we used to have with us were some of them dead and the others wounded, and Pedro Moreno besides always being a brave soldier was on that day a great help to us. Being as we were in that condition, thoroughly miserable and wounded, we knew nothing of either Cortés or Sandoval nor of their armies, whether they had been killed or routed, as the Mexicans told us they were when they cast [before us] the five heads which they brought tied together by the hair and the beards, saying that Malinche and all the Teules were already dead, and that thus they were going to kill all of us that very day. We were not able to get news from them because we were fighting half a league apart one from the other, and where they had defeated Cortés was furthest off, and for this very reason we were much distressed, but by all of us both wounded and sound keeping together in a body we held out against the shock of the fury of the Mexicans who came against us, and who did not believe

that there would be a trace of us left after the attack that they made upon us.

Then they had already captured one of our launches and killed three soldiers and wounded the captain and most of the soldiers who were in it, and it was rescued by another launch of which Juan Xaramillo was captain. Yet another launch was impaled in a place from which it could not move, and its captain was Juan de Linpias Caravajal, who went deaf at that time, and now lives in Puebla. He himself fought most valiantly and so encouraged his soldiers, who were rowing the launch that day, that they broke the stakes [on which they were impaled] and got away, all badly wounded, and saved their launch. This Linpias was the first to break the stakes and it was a great thing for all of us.

Let us return to Cortés ; when he and his people were nearly all killed or wounded the Mexican squadrons went towards his camp to attack it, and they even cast before the Soldiers, who were resisting the attack of the Mexicans, four other heads dripping with blood [which were those] of soldiers who had been carried off from Cortés himself, and they said that these were [the heads of] Tonatio, that is of Pedro de Alvarado, and of Sandoval and of Bernal Díaz and other Teules, and that they had already killed all of us who were at Tacuba. Then Cortés was much more depressed than he had been before and tears started from his eyes (and the eyes of all who were with him,) but not to such an extent as to permit them to notice depression or weakness in him. He at once ordered Cristóbal de Olid, who was quarter-master, and his captains to take care that the many Mexicans who were pressing on them did not break into the camp, and to keep both wounded and sound all close together in one body. He sent Andrés de Tápia with three horsemen post-haste by land, at the risk of their lives, to Tacuba which was our

camp, to find out if we were alive, and, if we were not routed, [to tell us] to keep a good look out in our camp and to form up in one body and to keep watch all together both by day and by night, and what he now sent to order us to do we had already made our custom. The Captain Andrés de Tápia and the three horsemen who came with him made great haste, although Tápia and two of those who came with him were wounded, and they were called Guillen de la Loa and Baldenebro and a Juan de Cuellar, all valiant men. When they reached our camp and found us fighting with the Mexican force which was still close to us, they rejoiced in their hearts and related to us what had happened about the defeat of Cortés and what he had sent to tell us, but they did not care to state that so many were dead, and said that about twenty five [had been killed] and that all the rest were well.

Let us stop talking of this and turn to Sandoval and his captains and soldiers, who marched on victoriously in the part and streets they had captured, and when the Mexicans had defeated Cortés they turned on Sandoval and his army and captains so effectively that he could make no headway, and they killed six soldiers and wounded all whom he had brought with him, and gave him [Sandoval himself] three wounds one in the thigh, another in the head and another in the left arm. While Sandoval was battling with the enemy they placed before him six heads of Cortés's men whom they had killed, and said they were the heads of Malinche and of Tonatio and other Captains, and that they meant so to do with Sandoval and those who were with him, and they attacked him fiercely. When Sandoval saw this he ordered all his captains and soldiers to show a brave spirit and not be dismayed, and to take care that in retreating there should not be any confusion on the causeway which was narrow, and first of all he ordered his allies, who were numerous, to clear off the

causeway so as not to embarrass him, and with [the help of] his two launches and of his musketeers and crossbowmen, with great difficulty he retired to his quarters, with all his men badly wounded and even discouraged and six of them dead. When he found himself clear of the causeway, although he was surrounded by Mexicans, he encouraged his people and their captains and charged them all to be sure to keep together in a body by day and by night so as to guard the camp and avoid defeat. Then when he learned from the captain Luis Marin, that they were well able to do it, wounded and bound up in rags as he was, he took two other horsemen with him and rode post haste to the camp of Cortés. When Sandoval saw Cortés he said "Oh Sir Captain, what is this? Are these the counsels and stratagems of warfare that you have always impressed on us, how has this disaster happened?" Cortés replied with tears springing to his eyes, "Oh my son Sandoval, for my sins this has been permitted, however I do not deserve as much blame in the matter as all my captains and soldiers impute, but the Treasurer Julian de Alderete to whom I gave the order to fill in that passage where they defeated us, and he did not do it, for he is not used to war nor to receive orders from Captains. Then the treasurer himself answered, for he was there by Cortés and had come to see and speak with Sandoval and to find out if his army was dead or defeated, and he said that Cortés himself was to blame and not he, and the reason he gave was that as Cortés was advancing victoriously and in order to follow up his advantage he cried out "Forward gentlemen" and never ordered them to fill in the bridge or bad passage, and that if he had ordered him to do so, his Captain and the allies would have done it. He also blamed Cortés for not ordering the many allies that he had with him to clear off the causeway in good time, and there were many other discussions and replies from Cortés to the

Treasurer which were spoken in anger, they will be left untold, and I will state how at that moment there arrived two launches which Cortés kept in the lake and by the causeway, and they had not come in nor had anything been known about them since the defeat. It seems that they had been detained and impaled on some stakes, and, according to what the captains reported, they had been kept there surrounded by canoes which attacked them, and they all came in wounded, and said that God in the first place aided them with a wind, and thanks to the great energy with which they rowed they broke the stakes; at this Cortés was well pleased, for up to that time, although he did not publish it so as not to dishearten the soldiers, he knew nothing about the launches and had held them as lost.

Let us leave this and return to Cortés who next strongly advised Sandoval to proceed at once post haste to our camp of Pedro de Alvarado, which was called Tacuba, and see whether we were routed, or how we stood, and if we were alive he should help us to keep up the defence so that they should not break into our camp, and he told Francisco de Lugo who accompanied him (Sandoval) (for he well knew that there were Mexican squadrons on the road), that he had already sent Andrés de Tápia with three horsemen to get news of us, and he feared that they had been killed on the road. After saying this to him and taking leave of him he went to embrace Sandoval, and said, "Look here, my son, as I am not able to go everywhere, for you can see that I am wounded, I commit this work to your care so that you may inspire confidence in all three camps. I know well that Pedro de Alvarado and all his captains and brothers and soldiers have fought valiantly and acted like gentlemen, but I fear the great forces of these dogs may have defeated him, and as for me and my army, you observe in what condition I am."

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Sandoval and Francisco de Lugo came post haste to where we were and when he arrived it was a little after dusk (*visperas*) and it seems that the defeat of Cortés took place before noon (*misa mayor*). When Sandoval arrived he found us fighting with the Mexicans who wanted to get into our camp by way of some houses which we had pulled down, and others by the causeway, and many canoes by the lake, and they had already got one launch stranded on the land, and of the soldiers who were in it two were dead and most of them wounded. Sandoval saw me and six other soldiers standing more than waist high in the water helping the launch to get off into deep water, and many Indians attacking us with swords which they had captured from us when Cortés was defeated, and others with broadswords [edged] with [flint] knives and were giving us sword cuts (and they gave me an arrow wound and a sword cut in the leg) so as to prevent us helping the launch, which, judging from the energy they were displaying, they intended to carry off with their canoes. They had attached many ropes to it with which to tow it off and place it inside the City. When Sandoval saw us in that position he said to us "Oh! Brothers put your strength into it and prevent them carrying off the launch" and we exerted so much strength that we soon hauled it out in safety, although as I have said, all of the sailors came out wounded and two dead.

At that time many companies of Mexicans came to the causeway and wounded the horsemen as well as all of us, and they gave Sandoval a good blow with a stone in the face. Then Pedro de Alvarado and other horsemen went to his assistance. As so many squadrons approached I and twenty other soldiers faced them, and Sandoval ordered us to retreat little by little so that they should not kill the horses, and because we did not retreat as quickly as he wished he said to us with fury "Do you wish that

through your selfishness they should kill me and all these horsemen? For the love of me, dear brothers, do fall back", at that moment the enemy again wounded him and his horse. Just then we cleared our allies off the causeway, and [we retreated] little by little keeping our faces [to the enemy] and not turning our backs, as though to form a dam. Some of the crossbowmen and musketeers were shooting and others loading their guns for they did not fire them off all together, and the horsemen made charges, and Pedro Moreno Medrano, already mentioned by me, loaded and fired his cannon, yet, notwithstanding the number of Mexicans that the balls were sweeping away, we could not fend them off, on the contrary they kept on following us thinking that this very night they would carry us off to be sacrificed.

When we had retreated near to our quarters and had already crossed a great opening where there was much water, the arrows, javelins and stones could no longer reach us. Sandoval, Francisco de Lugo and Andrés de Tápia were standing with Pedro de Alvarado each one relating what had happened to him and what Cortés had ordered, when again there was sounded the dismal drum of Huichilobos and many other shells and horns and things like trumpets and the sound of them all was terrifying, and we all looked towards the lofty Cue where they were being sounded, and saw that our comrades whom they had captured when they defeated Cortés were being carried by force up the steps, and they were taking them to be sacrificed. When they got them up to a small square in [front of] the oratory, where their accursed idols are kept, we saw them place plumes on the heads of many of them and with things like rans [in their hands?] they forced them to dance before Huichilobos, and after they had danced they immediately placed them on their backs on some rather narrow stones which had

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been prepared as [places for] sacrifice, and with stone knives they sawed open their chests and drew out their palpitating hearts and offered them to the idols that were there, and they kicked the bodies down the steps, and Indian butchers who were waiting below cut off the arms and feet and flayed [the skin off] the faces, and prepared it afterwards like glove leather with the beards on, and kept those for the festivals when they celebrated drunken orgies, and the flesh they ate in *chilmole*. In the same way they sacrificed all the others and ate the legs and arms and offered the hearts and blood to their idols, as I have said, and the bodies, that is their entrails and feet, they threw to the tigers and lions which they kept in the house of the carnivores which I have spoken about in an earlier chapter.

When we saw those cruelties all of us in our camp and Pedro de Alvarado and Gonzalo de Sandoval and all the other captains (let the interested readers who peruse this, note what ills we suffered from them [the Mexicans]) said the one to the other "thank God that they are not carrying me off to day to be sacrificed."

It should also be noted that we were not far away from them, yet we could render them no help, and could only pray God to guard us from such a death.

Then, at the moment that they were making the sacrifices, great squadrons of Mexicans fell on us suddenly and gave us plenty to do on all sides and neither in one way or the other could we prevail against them.

And they cried:—"Look, that is the way in which you will all have to die, for our gods have promised it to us many times." Then the words and threats which they said to our friends the Tlaxcalans were so injurious and evil that they disheartened them, and they threw them roasted legs of Indians and the arms of our soldiers and cried to them:—"Eat of the flesh of these Teules and

of your brothers for we are already glutted with it, and you can stuff yourselves with this which is over, and observe that as for the houses which you have destroyed, we shall have to bring you to rebuild them much better with white stone and well worked masonry, so go on helping the Teules, for you will see them all sacrificed."

There was another thing that Guatemoc ordered to be done when he won that victory, he sent to all the towns of our allies and friends and to their relations, the hands and feet of our soldiers and the flayed faces with the beards, and the heads of the horses that they had killed, and he sent word that more than half of us were dead and he would soon finish us off, and he told them to give up their friendship [with us] and come to Mexico and if they did not give it up promptly, he would come and destroy them, and he sent to tell them many other things to induce them to leave our camp and desert us, and then we should be killed by his hands.

As they still went on attacking us both by day and by night, all of us in our camp kept watch together, Gonzalo de Sandoval and Pedro de Alvarado and the other captains keeping us company during our watch, and although during the night great companies of warriors came [against us] we withstood them. Both by day and night half the horsemen remained in Tacuba and the other half were on the causeway.

There was another greater evil that they did us; no matter how carefully we had filled in [the water spaces] since we advanced along the causeway, they returned and opened them all and constructed barricades stronger than before. Then our friends of the cities of the lake who had again accepted our friendship and had come to aid us with their canoes believed that they "came to gather wool and went back shorn" for many of them lost their lives and many more returned wounded, and they lost more than

half of the canoes they had brought with them, but, even with all this, thenceforward they did not help the Mexicans, for they were hostile to them, but they carefully watched events as they happened.

Let us cease talking about misfortunes and once again tell about the caution, and the manner of it, that from now on we exercised, and how Gonzalo de Sandoval and Francisco de Lugo and Andrés de Tápia and Julio de Cuellar and Baldenebro and the other soldiers who had come to our camp thought it would be well to return to their posts and to give a report to Cortés as to how and in what position we stood. So they went post haste and told Cortés that Pedro de Alvarado and all his soldiers were using great caution both in fighting as well as in keeping watch, and moreover Sandoval, as he considered me a friend, said to Cortés that he had found me and the soldiers fighting more than waist high in water defending a stranded launch, and that if it had not been for us they [the enemy] would surely have killed the captain and soldiers who were on board, and because he said other things in my praise about when he ordered me to retreat, I am not going to repeat them here for other persons told of it, and it was known throughout the camp of Cortés and in our own, but I do not wish to recite it here. When Cortés clearly understood the great caution that we observed in our camp it greatly eased his heart, and from that time onwards he ordered all three camps not to fight with the Mexicans either too much or too little, meaning that we were not to trouble about capturing any bridge or barricade, and, except in defence of our camps, we were not to go out to fight with the enemy.

Nevertheless the day had hardly dawned when they were attacking our camp discharging many stones from slings, and javelins and arrows and shouting out hideous abuse, and as we had near the camp a very broad and

deep opening of water we remained for four days in succession without crossing it. Cortés remained as long in his camp and Sandoval in his. This determination, not to go out and fight and endeavour to capture the barricades which they [the Mexicans] had returned to open and fortify, was because we were all badly wounded and worn out with hardships, both from keeping watch and bearing arms without anything sustaining to eat ; and because we had lost the day before over sixty and odd soldiers from all the camps, and eight horses and so that we might obtain some rest, and take mature counsel as to what should be done. From that time onwards Cortés ordered us to remain quiet, as I have said, so I will leave off here and tell how and in what way we fought and everything else that happened in our camp.

CHAPTER CLIII.

About the way in which we fought, and the many attacks that the Mexicans made on us, and the parleys we had with them, and how our allies left us and went to their towns, and many other things that happened.

OUR method of fighting in all three camps was as follows :—All the soldiers kept watch on the causeways together with our launches on either side, half the horsemen went the rounds in Tacuba, where the bread was made for us and where we kept our baggage, and the other half guarded the bridges and the causeway. Early in the morning we prepared our arms to fight with the enemy, who tried to penetrate into our camp and endeavoured to defeat us, and they acted in the same way at the camp of Cortés and of Sandoval. This lasted only during five days for then we adopted another plan which I will speak about later on. Let me tell now how